

Hogan-Flair: No WCW Saver

Picture yourself in the spring of 1989. You've laid out a \$4 million offer for Hulk Hogan to jump from the WWF to WCW. Hogan says yes. The mainline media, as well as the wrestling press hails the instant parity and credibility.

This, however, is five years later. While a limited element of mainstream newspapers are using the Hogan signing as a springboard to stories of Ted Turner's impending success in wrestling, these same writers—most of whom know as much about wrestling as Skandor Akbar does about Egyptian history—are ignoring several key tidbits:

***Hogan's 1993 comeback was, by his standards of drawing power, an utter bomb. His *Wrestlemania* appearance did not sell out and his subsequent arena tour was aborted after only eight weeks when crowds were only in the 2,000-4,000 range.

COMMENTARY

***Hogan's current comeback vehicle, *Thunder in Paradise*, has declined in ratings every week since its early spring premiere. After a hot 9.7 in its debut two-hour movie, the series has fallen to a 4.9 average for its first ten episodes, knocking it well out of the top 20 among syndicated programs.

***The episodes of *WCW Saturday Night* in which Hogan was featured in taped appearances on the *Thunder* set have only averaged a 2.2, the calendar-year mark for the Saturday TBS show. Similar syndicated vignettes have made no dent in the languishing ratings.

***As Real Wrestling Hotline correspondent Scott Hudson said on the most recent live *Reporters' Roundtable*, "People forget. Hogan-Flair's been done before. Not well...but it's been done." While Vince McMahon clearly botched what had a major financial payoff written all over it by never bringing the two superstars to pay-per-view, the Hogan-Flair arena bouts in the fall of 1991 declined sharply at the gates in rematches of a blockbuster series of first confrontations.

***Whereas Hogan is still inarguably the biggest name in the history of the game and Flair the most popular NWA performer of the modern era, Hogan is believed to be nearing 41 years old and Flair is either 45 or 46, depending on which account you believe. While some purists argue the matchup is better than anything WCW could currently offer, other insiders believe both are five years past their prime drawing power.

While this was a no-brainer for any company with the money to attract Hogan, don't think this move was not made without careful research, which can sometimes be deceiving in delivering entertainment success. Insiders in the Turner organization not affiliated with WCW say research indicates the publicity over the impending appearances of Hogan has shifted the perception of leadership in the mat industry to the Turner group with scientifically-selected focus groups. The general consensus in the broadcast industry has been ratings increases typically develop nine to twelve months following research trends. However, one recalls a 1989 research project which depicted Ric Flair as heavily disliked in focus groups and led to a quick removal of

(Continued on Page 2)

Matwatch '94

Steve

Beverly

For you who have been with us off and on over the past six years, you know if I have a personal soapbox, it's for you folks to cultivate some kind of life outside of wrestling. The world does not solely revolve around the mat and your world should have a far broader context.

By the time some of you read this, my wife and I will likely be headed to another of those cultivating experiences. We'll even miss a pay-per-view in the process. But I have news for you: life will revolve ahead, no matter.

Three months ago, Rebecca and I accepted an offer to join 38 others from west Tennessee and Kentucky to take part in a two-week mission trip to Estonia in the Baltic States.

We'll be working on a church and community center during the trip and June 25, I'll be leading a media seminar for citizens of the city of Parnu in Estonia on effective ways to use the broadcast and print media.

We look on this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share with people for whom the window of opportunity is uncertain. While Lawler and Piper battle it out at *King-of-the-Ring* and while Hulk Hogan makes his debut WCW appearance, we'll be focused in a different direction.

The anticipation is high but the emotions are a bit scary because this is a part of the world we have never seen. People who don't fluently speak our language. A region where freedom is a new commodity.

Yet, the experience, we're sure, will be one we'll be sharing with our grandchildren. This clearly reminds us how much more the world consists of than pro wrestling. Thankfully!

We ask your thoughts as we make this journey. Also, as we seriously explore the possibilities of adoption, which we have learned is a slow, often-frustrating experience. But one, we're sure, is well worth it when reality comes.

Take care. We'll be back in the USA July 1. Our next issue of *Matwatch '94* will be mailed the week of July 18.

Steve Beverly

Hogan-Flair: No Gamesaver

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all Flair spots from a fall "T-B-Yes" on-air promotional campaign with Buddy Ebsen, Isabel Sanford, George Lindsey and assorted other Superstation rerun stars. Along the same line, analysts as experienced as Jim Cornette frequently criticized the use of surveys to develop characters during the Jim Herd WCW era, saying, "You can't research your way into a \$100,000 house." Yet, market research is what led to the initial national expansion of the World Wrestling Federation in 1984.

Three key points come to mind: one, in addition to the outrageous payoff, Hogan more than likely agreed to this, anticipating he could dovetail a six-month WCW swing into a major promotional boost for *Thunder*. Why else did he initially request to be called Hurricane, his character's name in the syndie

"Ric (Flair) will never be able to heel himself out of cheers this time. This is old NWA territory. Too many of those fans are still in the WCW audience and will never be satisfied without Flair being victorious."

hour? If so, it's clearly a miscalculation. The wrestling viewer and ticketbuyer is not necessarily going to associate the mat image with the series image and once viewers of dramatic series begin deserting, they've pretty well cast their votes on its success.

Two, WCW has to honestly know it cannot possibly make a profit on this deal, even if audiences do increase. If the recent figures Dave Meltzer was shown are correct, WCW pay-per-view revenues would have to increase 62 per cent from current averages to reach a break-even point with the Hogan deal. Won't happen. However, Ted Turner has always been of the philosophy one has to take on a loss leader on occasion to create an ultimate financial gain. That's why he originally bought the Atlanta Braves when the club was losing money because it provided popular programming for WTBS. That's why he took the TBS empire into major debt to buy MGM for its film library which ultimately brought the company to profit. It may not work with Hogan and WCW but you can bet the mortgage Turner's theory is in part responsible for this.

Third—and this may be the key reason why Hogan-Flair will not work in the fashion WCW desires. Despite the heavy hype (Tony Schiavone was close to a cardiac in announcing the Hogan signing on the June 4 Saturday show) and Flair's valiant attempts to revert himself to a heavy heel (with more than a veiled hint of the revival of some form of the Four Horsemen), this is in Flair's territory. Old NWA territory. A camp made far more of the 30-45 age group of viewers than the kids and teens who initially canonized Hogan. The demographic which far more will want to see Flair victorious. The evidence is already clear in recent announcements at WCW tapings in Atlanta, Gainesville and Orlando in which the supreme majority of fans booed when Hogan's name was announced as an ultimate opponent for Flair. Ric will never be able to heel himself out of cheers this time.

Much of a parallel exists with these two men to the mid-1960s era when Jack Nicklaus began to surpass Arnold Palmer as the biggest winner on the PGA tour. Fans actually booed Nicklaus at a number of stops because he began beating Palmer, the most popular human to ever set foot on a golf course because Jack was considered invading Arnie's birthright territory.

Try as they will, WCW is not going to be able to generate wild cheers for Hogan over Flair because traditional NWA fans never liked the publicity and success Hogan generated in the WWF while they considered their guy the most spectacular ring worker ever to take a bump. Enough of those people remain in the primary WCW TV audience that they won't be satisfied until Flair ultimately defeats Hogan clean in the middle. And Ric is miscalculating if he feels he has to go as far as using a plastic bag on Hogan will generate the desired reaction. The fans will cheer him even more. It will be a reliving of the era when Flair and the Horsemen could do nothing horrible enough to erode their cheers and the boos directed at viewer-weary Dusty Rhodes.

Hogan is not accustomed to this level of hostility and what will be interesting is to watch how he reacts. The series, as limited as it will be, will not proceed far enough into traditional WWF strongholds to attract enough of his fans and the guy is two years beyond his peak as the pre-eminent kid hero.

Ironically, this reasoning is why your editor differs from those who feel a Hogan victory over Flair in the first bout of the best-of-three (if that, in fact, is what develops) is the wrong start. As we see it, if the viewers and arena fans rally behind Flair in the manner we predict they will, the match of last impression—presumably at *Starrcade '94*—should be a Flair win over Hogan to reclaim the WCW belt to create the most viewer satisfaction. In that fashion, the series would parallel the three-TV bout Flair-Ricky Steamboat series of 1989 in which Steamboat endured an unfair and horrendous number of boos. But not nearly to the degree we predict will occur with Hogan.

If the viewers rally behind Flair, as we predict they will, the match of last impression in a best-of-3 series—presumably at Starrcade '94—should be a Flair victory over Hogan to reclaim the WCW belt.

Whether Hogan will ever accept such a scenario which results in Flair as the ultimate champion (and the bout of last impression is what will remain in viewers' minds) is another story. The whole affair seems silly for what is strictly entertainment but that issue has to be entering his mind. For what WCW is paying him, he ought to be willing to lay down for Flair in 15 seconds.

What hangs over this entire situation is how little electricity and anticipation appears to be building for this. The ratings are not increasing and the hints of Hogan appearances at two previous pay-per-view shows in late winter and early spring did nothing for the buy-rates. We'll have a clear idea well before December whether this is an idea well after its time.

We agree with forecasts of a hot turnout for Orlando and a jump in the buy-rate for *Bash-at-the-Beach* maybe to an 0.7-0.75. But we don't look for major gains in the weekly TV ratings and only a marginal jump for *Clash of the Champions*. A rematch would draw lower numbers and only Flair putting his career and possibly his hair on the line in a final bout against Hogan in December could come close to approaching the July numbers. If this scenario is correct, one has to ask what WCW intends to do next. Because the Hogan-Flair confrontation is clearly a concession that in five years, WCW has failed to develop a new star strong enough of supplanting the perennial mainstays.



HEADLINES

Eddie Quits USWA Again

MEMPHIS—Citing a combination of discontent and a new opportunity, Eddie Gilbert has again left the Memphis-based USWA.

Gilbert had walked out on a scheduled studio six-man match May 28 with Dream Machine (Troy Graham) and Bam Bam Bigelow as his partners. Gilbert had expressed backstage unhappiness with Graham and Bigelow being paired in a Mid-South Coliseum main event May 29 against Jerry Lawler and Brian Christopher.

The Lexington, Tn., native fulfilled dates May 28 in Jonesboro and his scheduled May 29 Memphis shot. But he gave notice June 1, reportedly saying he was assuming the booking post in Puerto Rico.

Galavision Shifts To Digital Signal

NEW YORK—Spanish cable and satellite network Galavision, home of the popular *Lucha Libre* wrestling series will be unavailable to dish owners and a number of cable viewers after this month.

The network is shifting from an analog to a digital signal not receivable by the home dish market or cable systems without digital decoders.

The American-based Telemundo network, which carries the Spanish version of *WWF Superstars* at 2 a.m. Sundays, will follow suit. Both webs will establish 800 phone numbers to gauge interest in viewers for digital decoders.

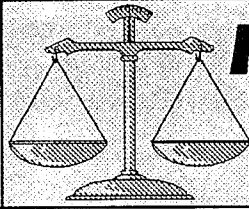
Three Join Real Hotline Lineup

FLOURISSANT, Mo.—Three print and broadcast veterans have joined the lineup of The Real Wrestling Hotline.

Ron Lemieux, former editor of *Arena Report*, is now hosting *Ron's Arena Ramblings* Wednesdays on Option 2. Lemieux reports from his base near the WCW syndication taping home of Orlando.

Steve Prazak as Steven DeTruth airs *The Truth, The Whole Truth and Nothing But DeTruth* Thursdays on Option 2. Prazak offers the heel counterpart to Scott Hudson's Thursday Option 1 *Potpourri*.

New England-based cable TV and radio mat talkfest host Cody Boyns has signed on with *Cody's Corner* Saturdays on Option 2. Boyns reports reaction from viewers of his call-in shows.



MATWATCH '94 EDITORIALS

SO WHICH IS IT, TED?

Ted Turner, if nothing else, is the most quotable man—as well as the most successful—in the history of cable TV. Yet, some of Turner's public statements in the past have gone against the grain of his cable networks' performances.

Case in point: one year ago when Turner vehemently told Congress to establish governmental guidelines on televised violence and "ram it down the networks' throats." The next day, on *WCW Saturday Night*, was the infamous minimovie murder attempt of Vader and Sid Vicious against Sting and Davey Boy Smith.

Turner has enthusiastically signed onto the concept of an independent monitor to gauge the amount of violence on cable and network television at a time when his pay-per-view mat shows feature the heaviest amount of violent content of the genre.

Matwatch '94 is of the view if Mr. Turner is to be consistent in his views, he should be equal in his enthusiasm for such a monitor to extend the review to all TBS basic cable and pay wrestling programs. One cannot single out an area, such as wrestling, and term it "just people pushing and shoving each other," as Mr. Turner has done publicly and privately in the past, in the category of violence in television.

ON THE OTHER HAND....

Ted Turner is to be saluted for not giving up on *World Championship Wrestling*, when much of the buying public, publications such as this one, and his key corporate executives have previously suggested throwing in the towel.

The decision to sign Hulk Hogan may indeed be a years-too-late move and an attempt to relive yesterday's news. However, it is an honest effort to risk a big bankroll for the inarguably the biggest name in the history of the game. It is squarely up to the viewers and ticketbuyers whether enough luster remains in Hogan vs. Ric Flair to make WCW the leader in the industry.

Let it not be forgotten: had Ted Turner not bought the Atlanta Braves or Atlanta Hawks, both teams would have long since departed Georgia's capital city. In the mid-1980s, when the Braves were languishing miserably at the gate and in TV ratings, Turner ignored advice to sell the team. While the Braves are yet to win a World Series, they have become the most successful team, in won-loss records and ratings, in the 1990s.

Turner has been equally as loyal to wrestling because of his belief it helped him to build his broadcast/cable empire as the first show ever to draw 100,000 homes on Channel 17 in Atlanta in the early '70s. Win or lose, *Matwatch '94* salutes Mr. Turner's determination and patience, a commodity which could be a valuable learning experience for his wrestling executives.

HANG IN THERE, BORIS!

Recent weeks have brought the news of leukemia which has stricken one of the greatest villains in the history of the ring, Larry Simon, better known to thousands who watched him in the '60s and '70s as Boris (The Great) Malenko.

Malenko does not have the national fame of the legendary Dick the Bruiser, Crusher Reggie Lisowski or Killer Kowalski because the bulk of his career was spent packing houses in Florida, rather than in Madison Square Garden or the major media centers of the Northeast. His feuds and later union with the late Eddie Graham lifted Florida wrestling and Gordon Solie to fabled status.

Elsewhere in this issue a memoir of editor Steve Beverly, who saw Malenko from the peak of his career in the mid-1960s to his dramatic babyface turn at the end of an episode of *Championship Wrestling from Florida* in 1971.

Malenko was from the old school of wrestling practitioner who knew his local audience and delivered whatever the customer demanded to bring him back week after week, a quality too often lost on today's made-for-TV performers.

The man who made a career from the Cold War is now fighting a battle far more challenging than any he took to the ring 30 years ago. *Matwatch '94* extends its prayers to Larry and his family with a hope he fights his current villain with the intensity he always did in his mat career.

THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

Apr. Averages	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Mar. Avg.
Monday Night Raw	3.4/4.2	2.09 million	2.9/4.3
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.0	1.34 million	2.5/5.2
WWF All-American	2.0/5.4	1.25 million	2.2/5.5
WCW Main Event	2.0/3.8	1.25 million	2.3/4.0
WCW Pro	1.5/5.8	936,000	1.7/6.5
WWF Mania	1.3/4.5	781,000	1.3/3.8

May Averages	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Year Ago
Monday Night Raw	3.0/4.5	1.79 million	2.7/4.0
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.5	1.56 million	2.0/4.9
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.7	1.44 million	1.9/4.3
WWF All-American	1.7/5.5	1.38 million	2.1/6.9
WCW Pro	1.4/5.6*	1.07 million	1.3/5.3**
WWF Mania	1.0/3.7	777,500	1.1/3.8

Week Ending June 6

Monday Night Raw	3.1/4.9	1.92 million	2.5/3.8
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/6.1	1.29 million	2.0/4.5
WCW Main Event	2.0/4.6	1.24 million	N/A
WWF All-American	1.6/5.1	989,000	2.4/7.3
WCW Pro	1.4/6.2	857,000	1.3/5.1**
WWF Mania	0.9/3.7	556,000	0.8/2.6

* Does not figure in 0.8 rating outside of time period May 28

** 1993 average for May and first week in June of WCW Power Hour

THE REAL WRESTLING

HOTLINE

OPTION 1

Dave Meltzer (M-W-F)

Steve Beverly (Tu-Sa)

Scott Hudson (Th)

Mark Madden (Su)

OPTION 2

Mark Mooneyham (M)

Scott Hudson (Tu)

Ron Lemieux (W)

Steven DeTruth (Th)

Critic-at-Large (Fr)

Cody Boyns' Corner (Sa)

Georgiann Makropoulos (Su)

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99 cents per minute

THE TRENDS

A year ago, we were looking at upward trends for two shows other than *Monday Night Raw*. *WWF All-American* and *WCW Main Event* had both improved in June over the previous month with *All-American* the most impressive, finishing in the national Nielsen top 30 every week during the month.

As a parody on an old song might suggest, what a difference a year makes! The *All-American* show is the fastest-falling cable mat hour on the air, dropping from a 2.4 the first week in June last year to a weak 1.6 this year, a full 33 per cent decline. *WCW Saturday Night* and *Main Event* are either flat or barely ahead of last year's pace. An argument can clearly be made two problems exist for *All-American*, not unlike those the TBS Sunday show has been plagued with in the last year. So much concentration has been placed on making *Monday Night Raw* the flagship show for cable, for one, and so much turnover in the host and co-host slot on *All-American* has placed the Sunday USA hour in the stepchild role for Titan Sports.

However, the puzzle for TBS is why *WCW Saturday Night* is only pacing marginally ahead of last year when Eric Bischoff only averaged a 2.1 for the first 18 weeks of his regime. The much-ballyhooed Ric Flair-Ricky Steamboat WCW world title bout on Saturday only drew a 2.4, a full rating point below the Flair-Sting blockbuster of last summer. The attempt to use the Larry Zbyszko-Steve Regal WCW TV title bout as a cliffhanger, likewise, didn't work. The May 28 unfinished ending jumped slightly to a 2.3 but the June 4 finish fell to a 2.1. With the exception of a brief rally in April and May, *Saturday Night* has failed to produce the improvement Bill Shaw believed Bischoff would engineer. Bischoff clearly has to hope the July 9 live trial for the Saturday show and Hulk Hogan's appearances will bolster the show to consistent 2.4 and 2.5 ratings—otherwise, his 18-month revamping would have to be considered, ostensibly, a failure.

The Sunday afternoon hour is similarly in a state of flux. The show built to its biggest rating in 16 months, a 2.7, at one point in April, then came crashing back to earth, falling to a 1.7 in May and barely returning to a 2.0 June 7—flat with its full-month June average of a year ago. But don't expect any panic at TBS over the numbers. Ted has spoken and wrestling stays, no matter what.

THEIR FAIR SHARE

What TBS is pleased with is the share percentages for its series. While advertising is sold on the basis of ratings and demographics, cable judges growth patterns with its series share trends. That's where two WCW shows are trending much better than last year.

WCW Saturday Night scored a 6.1 share June 6, far stronger than the 4.5 on the same date in 1993. *WCW Pro* tacked on a 6.2 share versus a 5.1 a year ago. *Main Event* earned a 4.6 share, down from last June's 4.9 average for the month.

On the WWF side, *Raw* was up to a 4.9 share June 8 against its 3.8 year-ago mark. *Mania* was up to a 3.7 share from the deadly 2.6 in 1993. But the crack came with *All-American's* fall from 7.3 a year ago to 5.1 June 7.

Within the industry, the benchmark of success for shows in the morning-to-noon hours is a 6-6.5 per cent share. In the late afternoon-early evening slots, cable shares are expected to reach a minimum 5 share. For prime time, the bellweather mark is a 4.

MATWATCH SUBSCRIPTIONS

U.S./CANADA: \$5 for 3 issues. One bonus issue for every 3-issue gift set. \$1.75 per single copy.

OVERSEAS: \$9 for 3 issues, \$3 per single copy.

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Malenko

A Matwatch Memory

T

he accounts of Larry Simon struggling against leukemia revive the memory of how he perpetually antagonized crowds in Florida and the Carolinas during the 1960s and early '70s as The Great Malenko. Allegedly from Moscow, Malenko was the epitome of the Cold War bitterness between America and the Soviet Union and far better played than the pathetic efforts of Sgt. Slaughter and company during the Persian Gulf War. Malenko generated genuine hate.

Boris Malenko never had to mention the United States. He just looked as if he had been born evil. In all of his years dominating the Florida circuit as its most excoriated heel, Sunshine State fans truly believed he had the mental wherewithal to kill Eddie Graham.

When I first saw Malenko, in a 1965 date at the Jacksonville Coliseum, long-time fan Mary Rogers, who sat midway in the box seats section at what is now the average TV camera level, told my group before the show, "I just believe if Eddie's not careful, Malenko's gonna come out here and kill him some night. He's either gonna have a knife or a gun."

That evening, Malenko—who had spent four weeks off after being stabbed by a ringsider at a Carolina card—had demanded a swap on the card, which sent Hiro Matsuda into a preliminary bout against Les Thatcher and elevated him to a late-card confrontation with old rival Graham. Boris brought Bill Dromo to the ring with him that night (we Georgians who had seen the popular Dromo on our weekly Atlanta show couldn't understand how Bill could walk alongside Malenko). Even Eddie's retreat to the dressing room to retrieve Sam Steamboat couldn't stop Malenko from sending Graham out with a stretcher job. And he milked every minute of it from an incensed crowd.

Through the '60s, we saw Malenko as the ultimate obstacle for an assortment of foes: Joe Scarpa (later Chief Jay Strongbow), Johnny Valentine, Red Bastien, Sailor Art Thomas, Dory Funk Jr. (Malenko was Dory's first opponent after Dory defeated Gene Kiniski for the NWA world belt in 1969), Don Curtis, Jose Lothario, Nick Kozak and, eventually, Jack Brisco—who was the only one other than Graham who appeared to tame the villiany of Malenko.

One of the craziest angles was in 1967 when Graham saved Steamboat from a TV bout where Malenko "tried to bite" off Sam's ear. Graham knocked Malenko's dentures out and stomped them in the mat. Eddie was "suspended" for three months until he finally agreed to pay to replace the teeth.

Malenko came within a hair of killing my Aunt Maude Pugh a few years before her 1971 death. Aunt Maude had a date with Malenko every Saturday at 4 at her trailer in Perry, Fla. One weekend, when Malenko and the Missouri Mauler (Larry Hamilton) attacked Beautiful Brutus (Mike Davis a/k/a Buggy McGraw), Aunt Maude threw her chiropractic pillow at the TV set, so mad was she at Malenko's misbehavior. I thought I was on the verge of having to call paramedics until Aunt Maude yelled, "Honey, go get me my nerve pills!" She wrote Gordon Solie every other week to complain about why Gordon wouldn't stop Malenko's antics.

One of the most dramatic and effective babyface turns ever came during a 1971 summer edition of *Championship Wrestling from Florida*, when the greatest mat announcer of all-time, Ed Capral, and Jim Crockett Sr. were subbing for Solie. Film clips were shown of the previous Tuesday night in Tampa when Malenko dived off the top rope onto Rene Goulet and cost Goulet and cost Dick Murdoch and Rene Goulet a match against Brisco and Mr. Wrestling (Tim Woods).

In the day's final TV bout, Malenko teamed with Murdoch and Goulet against three mid-level Florida performers. After each

spending about two minutes in the ring, Murdoch tagged Malenko and Dick and Rene walked out on Boris, leaving him to a pummeling at the hands of the babyface threesome. A Malenko, more irate than in any previous heel segment, grabbed the mike from Capral and screamed, "Murdoch, Goulet....if it takes a lifetime, I'll KILL you!"

The next week, around the Florida circuit was the bout which fans never believed would occur: Eddie Graham and The Great Malenko against Murdoch and Goulet. The crowds were enormous, topped by a turnaway 9,500 at Jacksonville. The Malenko turn took nearly six months to cool.

By the mid-'70s, Malenko was a fading performer in Florida but regenerated his old heel image on the Tennessee-Alabama circuit. Reader Diane Devine remembers a bout between Malenko and

Ron Garvin as "one of the bloodiest I've ever seen." Later, Boris would be an investor in Sun Belt Wrestling, a short-lived early '80s challenge to the Florida NWA circuit, but Boris managed to introduce his sons Joe and Dean, who gained a measure of note later in Japan as some of the top tag workers in the Orient.

The Malenko aura hadn't died when WCW brought a pay-per-view to St. Petersburg in 1991, one of the last

Turner shows to attract a crowd of nomadic newsletter subscribers. A number of the visiting gang from Florida spotted Boris at the hotel fans' gathering the day before the show. Malenko invited them to his gym and regaled them with classic mat stories. Veteran wrestling writer Jeff Bowdren told me how Malenko appeared to be genuinely touched at the interest from the hardcore fans.

Larry Simon as Boris Malenko was miles from the greatest worker in the world. But he is one of the great characters in wrestling's history. Today, he must draw more than money to be successful in his fight against a killer. This time, an angle won't help get it over.

But The Great Malenko was a dynamic performer in an era before today's tightly-packaged, high-tech, formula-scripted TV mat presentations. A day when we weren't so sophisticated to analyze workrates and production quality. Malenko never had to have a script. He just spat the venom from the hip and we reacted as he desired.

Malenko likely couldn't do today what he did during his career because of so much asinine political correctness. He intensified our disgust with the Soviet Union in the 1960s. He made us cheer even more for his opponents. Most of all, he made us hate him. And he caused us to spend an hour every Saturday to hate him and pay money to hate him. For that, I know of no higher compliment to pay.

The Great Malenko was a dynamic performer in an era when we weren't so sophisticated to analyze workrates and production quality. He couldn't do today what he did during his career because of this asinine political correctness.



The Best of Early June

1. Jerry Lawler, *WWF Superstars*, on Roddy Piper: "His movies are so boring, he donates half his money to yawn research." 2. Paul E. Dangerously, *ECW*: "If Darren Daulton could catch as good as Mikey Whipwreck catches chairs, the Phillies would be in first place." 3. Paul E., *ECW*, on substitute host Willie Watts: "Who taught you how to announce? Hooked on Phonics?" 4. Lawler, *WWF*, on Piper: "His father used to walk him to school because they were in the same grade." 5. Bobby Heenan, *WCW Main Event*, on Terry Funk: "He's a couple of fries short of a Happy Meal." 6. Dusty Rhodes, *WCW Pro*, on Cactus Jack's sunset flip: "That looked more like a honeybun." 7. Lance Russell, *USWA*: "If Bert Prentice is a coach, I'd hate to see who the general manager is." 8. Lawler, *WWF*: "McMahon, your mind took a night off and couldn't find its way back home." 9. Jackie Spencer, *Global*: "Marc Valiant is like a desert. He's a wasteland of the mind." 10. Todd Pettengill, *WWF Mania*: "That's the helicopter to take me to play golf. Bill Clinton pays for everything." 11. Gordon Solie/Larry Zbyszko, *WCW Pro*, on Sullivan/Cactus: (GS) "Two captains on the same boat going in opposite directions. It can't work." (LZ) "Unless you break the boat in half." 12. Scott Bowden, *USWA*: "Brian Christopher's the only guy who goes to a VD clinic to meet women." 13. Piper, *Monday Night Raw*: "Is that Lawler? Nah, it's a jellyfish but neither one of them has a spine." 14. Piper, *Raw*: "Lawler, you said you saw Helen Hart at the zoo. Were you a spectator or were you just being fed?" 15. Lawler, *Raw*, to "Roddy Piper": "Your muscles look like mosquito bites on a strand of spaghetti." 16. Heenan, *WCW*: "WCW is hazardous to my health." 17. Heenan, *WCW*: "Garfield Quinn is the brother of Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman."

Strongest Comments

1. Scott Hudson, *The Real Wrestling Hotline*: "People forget Flair and Hogan's been done before. Not well....but it's been done." 2. Dave Meltzer, *TRWH*: "From that interview, it sounds like Dusty's coming back to the ring. This is scary!" 3. Mike Samples, *USWA*: "Guns don't kill people. I do." 4. Vince McMahon/Randy Savage, *Raw*: (V) "Have you seen *The Flintstones*?" (RS) "Yeah. The best part was the credits because it was over. You don't want to see it."

And the Rest....

BEST SIGN: Fan on *WCW Pro*: "Kevin Sullivan—Poster Boy for True Value Hardware."

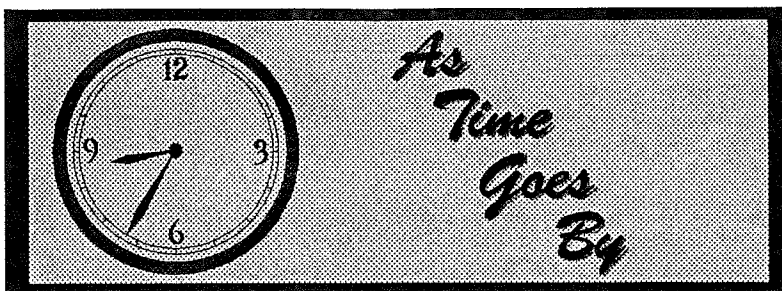
CHEAP SHOT AWARD: Savage/McMahon, *Raw*, for obvious knock at *The Flintstones* because the characters are owned by Ted Turner's Hanna-Barbera.

HAPPIER DAYS AWARDS: 1. *Best of Arsenio Hall*, for two-year-old rerun of Nasty Boys and Jimmy Hart as *WWF* regulars. 2. *Vicki!*, for June 8 repeat featuring Rick Rude and Missy Hyatt as *WCW* regulars.

ALL-CLICHE TEAM: 1. Rhodes, *WCW*, "...fight fire with fire." 2. Samples, *USWA*: "...the more things change, the more they stay the same."

BLOOPER AWARD: Bam Bam Bigelow, *USWA*, for calling Beale Street in Memphis "Bourbon Street."

BOO AWARD: *WMC-TV, Memphis*, for dropping the wrestling results from its news bumpers Monday nights.



Did you notice the less-than-disguised slap at Turner Broadcasting on *Monday Night Raw* by Vince McMahon and Randy Savage? They trashed *The Flintstones*, which was only the biggest-grossing flick in the history of Memorial Day weekend and only happens to be owned by TBS, parent company of Hanna-Barbera. These guys must really be getting antsy about these newspaper stories suggesting *WCW* is on the verge of parity with the *WWF*....Hogan made his official pronouncement of his *WCW* signing on CNN's *Showbiz Today*. Seems the order to do something on it came from Ted Turner's son but it was conveniently shifted to CNN's entertainment show....McMahon may have been at his obnoxious worst on the June 6 *Raw*. He screamed and gargled through every minute of the Tatanka-Crush bout. The great sports announcer Lindsey Nelson once said, "If an announcer is too hyper from start-to-finish, he has nothing to build to for the audience in the exciting moments."

Suggestions in another publication contend the Chuck Austin case will force the big two to rely less on jobbers and put more competitive matches on TV. One counteropinion was that more competitive matches on TV would be disastrous for arena gates. Five years ago, maybe. But today, how can the gates be any worse than they are for *WCW*, when and if the group runs arenas....The Paul Heyman-produced *Eastern Championship* show has become the textbook hour for hardcore viewers—but I wish Paul E. would lay off those angles with Tazmaniac foaming at the mouth....Word last week of Mick Foley giving *WCW* notice as Cactus Jack is another example of how this group has never understood how to best use the Cactus character. As a babyface, he could have been marketed as the most popular kids' character in years, had *WCW* inserted some Saturday morning vignettes on the old *Power Hour* or *Pro* with Cactus giving children safety tips or a weekly lesson. He'll be missed.

Ted Koppel reportedly was proposed and rejected doing a *Nightline* on the Titan woes but wouldn't rule out a perspective episode if the case goes to trial and heats up in the national media....Former Baltimore mat radio talk host Kimberly Murphy is engaged to wed J. Calvin Smith in October ceremonies. Congratulations....We keep being asked why ESPN2 persists in running these Global repeats, rather than new shows. Key reason: the cable net owns the rights to 160 Global shows and they're bought and paid for. They simply fill time, which is what most of ESPN2 does....North Georgia promoter Sam Kent rejected a pitch from *WCW* to take its lower-level performers and put them over his regulars on TV, in order to give them more work.

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